

been viewed by Europeans as ignorant and primitive people with only crude technology, representing a fossilised form of an earlier stage of human social and cultural evolution or, in a more romantic vision, as noble savages in harmony with nature. To some extent, this latter idealised view still prevails in some quarters. However, we now know from a great deal of archaeological evidence that pre-European life was definitely “nasty brutish and short” and, for the bulk of people, probably on a par with Medieval Europe in many respects.

I hope that this paper will serve to dispel romantic notions about the nature of pre-European fishing in New Zealand and reveal the Māori for what he really was—profoundly knowledgeable about the sea and its resources, and well able to harvest fish in a manner which conformed, in the main, to the customs of his ancestors in the tropical Pacific.

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